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AUTHOR Vines, Lois
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ABSTRACT

Ohio University's Modern Languages Department designed two sequences of courses in French and Spanish for students in journalism and communication. The six-course programs provide curricula based on print and broadcast media, and stress listening, reading, and speech skills. The program was begun to encourage journalism students to pursue professionally useful language study and to coordinate with the incentive provided by journalism school and language department foreign internships. Enthusiastic support was found in the journalism school, and a federal grant was obtained to implement the program. Other preparations included coordinated scheduling with the journalism program, production of a recruitment brochure, preregistration advising, and participation in precollege orientation. Retention during the program's first year has been good. Instructional techniques use video recordings from satellite transmissions, audio recordings, foreign newspapers and magazines, the computer laboratory, and a review grammar text in a variety of exercises. Guest native speakers and journalists with international experience are also invited to address and participate in classes. The program has been found to a strong student motivator, to have brought visibility to the language department, and to have produced a fruitful collaboration with the journalism school. (MSE)

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MOTIVATING JOURNALISM STUDENTS TO BECOME PROFICIENT
IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE:
A TWO-YEAR SEQUENCE OF PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA
COURSES IN FRENCH AND SPANISH

By

Dr. Lois Vines

Department of Modern Languages

Ohio University

Athens, Ohio

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MOTIVATING JOURNALISM STUDENTS TO BECOME PROFICIENT IN A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE: A TWO-YEAR SEQUENCE OF PRINT AND BROADCAST MEDIA
COURSES IN FRENCH AND SPANISH

Lois Vines

Ohio University

In the fall of 1984 the Modern Languages Department at Ohio University launched two sequences of courses designed to teach French and Spanish to students in journalism and communications. The purpose of the project is to encourage the study of foreign languages among American students planning careers in journalism and in other fields of communications. By providing new courses based on print and broadcast media in French and Spanish, our goal is to motivate the students to study the target language for a minimum of six quarters in order to acquire skills that will be useful to them professionally. Acquiring listening, reading, and speaking skills at a level high enough to be able to function well in the target language requires at least two years of study beyond the beginning courses. Therefore, we are especially interested in attracting College of Communications students during their first two years on campus so that they can complete the six-course sequence in French or Spanish and even go on to complete a major or minor in the language.

Rationale for Creating Special Courses

Our decision to make an aggressive effort to encourage journalism and communications students to study French or Spanish beyond the beginning level was based on four factors:

1. Foreign language courses count towards the requirements for several degrees in the College of Communications, but very few journalism and communications majors select these courses as an area of concentration. The Bachelor of Science in Journalism requires that three-fourths of the student's program consist of courses in the liberal arts and sciences and one-fourth in professional courses in journalism. Although journalism students are required to take only one course in a foreign language above the beginning level, they must also take a minimum of thirty-six hours in a single department within the College of Arts and Sciences or a minimum of eighteen approved hours in each of two departments in Arts and Sciences. When we examined our enrollment data for the intermediate level in French and Spanish, we found that most journalism majors dropped the study of a foreign language after completing the one required quarter. By creating French and Spanish courses at the intermediate and advanced levels that would be specifically related to the interests of journalism students, we hoped to increase the possibility that these students would choose French or Spanish as one of their areas of concentration in the College of Arts and Sciences. Students majoring in other fields in the College of Communications (general communication, interpersonal communication, telecommunications, and communication management)

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can also elect foreign language courses to fulfill part of the general requirements for their degrees. Our goal in the Modern Languages Department is to offer foreign language courses that are of particular interest to these students so that they will be more likely to choose French or Spanish as an area of concentration.

2. Incentives to become proficient in a foreign language exist in the Ohio University School of Journalism. Each year a foreign correspondents course is offered from which students are selected for internships abroad. For assignments outside the English-speaking world, top priority is given to students who can communicate in French or Spanish. One problem in the past has been that outstanding students in journalism often did not have the foreign language skills needed to carry out a foreign internship assignment. The director of the foreign correspondents internship program, Professor John Wilhelm, has been one of the strongest supporters of our new sequence of courses in French and Spanish. He emphasizes in his foreign correspondents course that proficiency in a foreign language is absolutely necessary for an assignment in a country where English is not the national language. Students who want to be a journalism intern in a French- or Spanish-speaking country or in a Spanish-speaking area of the United States increase their chances of selection by taking the special sequence of courses offered by the Modern Languages Department.

In addition to the foreign internships offered by the O.U. School of Journalism, there are two other programs that provide

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incentives for journalism students to become proficient in a foreign language during their first two or three years at the University. The Club Français d'Amérique offers summer internships with French and Quebec newspapers on a competitive basis.¹ Participants are selected on the basis of their performance in journalism and their proficiency in French. Ohio University student Charles Pinyan was among the six interns selected to participate in the program in the summer of 1985.

The Ohio University Modern Languages Department sponsors one-quarter academic programs in France and Mexico for which students at the beginning and advanced levels in French and Spanish may apply. These opportunities to go abroad and communicate in the foreign language provide strong incentives for journalism students to complete the six-course sequence in French or Spanish.

3. The enthusiastic support we have received from our colleagues in the College of Communications and especially in the School of Journalism was also a major factor in our decision to create special sequences of courses in French and Spanish for journalism and communications majors. Journalism Professor Ralph Izard collaborated with us on writing the grant and has been tireless in his efforts to advertise the courses in his college and recommend them to students. This close collaboration and support from communications and journalism is an important factor in the success of our courses. A positive, encouraging attitude towards the study of foreign language is evident among journalism professors at Ohio University and students are aware of it. If we can expand the global view of future journalists, we will have

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indeed made a step forward.

4. Last, but certainly not least, our motivation to create new sequences of courses in French and Spanish was partly based on self-interest. We need to recruit more students at the intermediate and advanced levels, where the enrollment tends to fall sharply. In French, for example, the first quarter of the beginning level has an average of 175 students; by the end of the intermediate level there is an enrollment of about 60. Only about twenty-five students go on to the third-year advanced conversation and composition course. By adding a special section of French for journalism and communications students with an enrollment of fifteen, we hope to increase the number of students at the advanced level by one-third. Out of this group we might also add to our number of majors and minors in French. The same situation and goals apply to Spanish.

Applying for a Grant

Our plan to create special sequences of French and Spanish courses based on print and broadcast media and designed to attract journalism and communications students seemed to fit the type of projects funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education's Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Programs. In cooperation with the O.U. School of Journalism, the Modern Languages Department submitted a grant application in the fall of 1983. Six months later we learned that our project had been selected for an award of \$42,000 for the first year. Just recently we were notified that an additional \$43,000 for the

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second year has been approved.

The grant includes funding to cover released time for professors to prepare the new courses; instructional materials such as newspapers, magazines, and computer programs in both French and Spanish; travel expenses and honoraria for guest speakers representing the French- and Spanish-speaking media; and partial cost of a satellite dish to bring in live television broadcasts from Montreal and Mexico City. Since only five percent of the grant funds could be used for equipment, matching funds were sought from sources within Ohio University. The O. U. 1804 Fund provided an additional \$10,000 to cover the purchase and installation of the satellite dish.

Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention

Immediately after learning that our grant had been awarded, we met with colleagues in journalism to plan advising strategies. In order to realize our goal of attracting journalism and communications students to the study of foreign languages and cultures it was very important to advertise the special French and Spanish media courses and make sure that advisors in modern languages and communications were informed about the new courses. By working in close collaboration with journalism we were able to schedule the two media sections of French and Spanish at a time when they would not conflict with required journalism courses. We produced a brochure about the courses and distributed it in time for the spring pre-registration period during which students choose courses they will be taking fall

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quarter.

Our recruiting efforts were aimed at two groups of students: 1) those already on campus who were completing the first year of French and Spanish or already had the equivalent, and 2) freshmen who would be entering the university in the fall with at least two or three years of French or Spanish completed. We were able to reach students in the first group through our pre-registration advising process. Many students in the second group came to campus in the summer for pre-college orientation. It was essential that these students be made aware of the media courses in French and Spanish for two reasons: 1) by continuing their language studies fall quarter of their freshman year they would be more likely to succeed because they would be reinforcing their acquired skills right away, and 2) by getting them interested in foreign language media courses early in their academic careers, they would be more likely to continue studying French or Spanish at the advanced level, would qualify for foreign internships, and could take advantage of study abroad opportunities offered by our department.

Our recruiting efforts were very successful. The goal for fall quarter was to fill one section each of the media courses in French and Spanish. We try to limit class sections to twenty students in our department. The maximum we normally allow is twenty-five. In the media course in French we accepted twenty-eight students, and twenty-four were enrolled in Spanish.

Our next concern was retention. Since journalism and communications students are required to take only one foreign language course at the intermediate level, the critical moment

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came at the end of fall quarter when they made the decision either to continue in the foreign language as a humanities elective or select another area of concentration. In French twenty-four out of the original twenty-eight students enrolled in the second quarter of the media sequence; in Spanish nineteen students out of the twenty-four continued. In the spring quarter twenty students enrolled in French and seventeen in Spanish. Given the many scheduling problems inherent in the system, we are very pleased with our retention rate during the first year of the sequence.

Our long-range goal is to keep these same students in the sequence for another three quarters at the advanced level. We will be able to achieve this goal as long as the courses continue to be interesting, demanding, and relevant to journalism and communications. With the availability of live programs brought in by satellite dish and the higher skill levels of the students, their motivation is increasing as their comprehension level rises.

Curriculum Development

Although language faculty members regularly read the foreign press, teaching the target language through the use of print and broadcast media requires a great deal of preparation that goes beyond the cursory reading of a newspaper or magazine. We began our curriculum development in the summer of 1984 with a workshop under the direction of Alvina Ruprecht, a French professor at

Carleton University in Ottawa, who established the first courses at her institution designed to teach French through the use of the news media to Anglophone Canadian journalism students. Her work was brought to my attention through an article she had published in the Canadian Modern Language Review.²

Professor Ruprecht provided a great deal of bibliographical material on the Francophone press as well as sample class assignments. She also showed video segments taken from French Canadian television programs and gave a demonstration on how she makes use of them in class. Although her students are more advanced than ours and have constant access to the Francophone media, we found that many ideas she presented could be adapted to the intermediate level, where our special sequence begins.

Our next step was to order subscriptions to French- and Spanish-language newspapers and news magazines to add to the limited number already available at the University library. These periodicals are used in two ways: 1) the instructor selects articles, photocopies enough for each student, and bases class assignments on articles read by all the students; and 2) students go to the library, research articles on a specific topic in various newspapers and magazines, and then complete individual assignments.

In order to help students acquire listening comprehension skills necessary to understand live broadcasts, we use audio and video programs which are appropriate for the intermediate level, such as Aérodrame³, a French radio drama divided into 20-minute segments with follow-up questions, Champs-Élysées⁴, a bi-weekly broadcast from Radio Luxembourg that includes a transcript for

verification of comprehension, and Contact French⁵, a video series produced by John Rassias at Dartmouth College designed to introduce students to live situations, interviews, and different French accents. In the French sequence, I continue to use these programs along with segments of broadcasts brought in by satellite dish to monitor in our language laboratory, where students can watch live programs from Montreal and Mexico City.

Our computer lab serves as an efficient means of reviewing basic grammar, perfecting idioms that are common in both print and broadcast media, and reinforcing comprehension of audio and video material. After listening to audio or video assignments, students then go to the computer lab where they use a program that is specifically designed to help them verify what they understood (or misunderstood). The computer programs are very effective in preparing students for class discussions on programs they have listened to or viewed on their own.

The only textbook used in the intermediate sequence of courses for journalism students is a review grammar. Since students enter the sequence after a three-month summer break and from a variety of language-learning backgrounds, a systematic review of grammar is necessary. In the French sequence I try to relate each chapter of grammar to listening or reading assignments. For example, after reviewing how to form different types of questions in French, the students read and studied interviews and opinion polls found in the Francophone press and watched interviews on video tapes. Then they prepared interviews with each other and with native speakers of French whom I invited to class. They also wrote a questionnaire in French for an

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opinion poll on alcoholism and smoking, which they administered to their classmates. The vocabulary for both subjects was provided in newspaper articles they had read. The review of grammar has been very effective because it is constantly reinforced by examples in print and broadcast media.

Developing techniques for teaching French and Spanish through the use of the media requires imagination, the desire to try different approaches and materials, and new ways of testing students. At the intermediate level a great deal of care must be taken in the selection of articles and broadcasts to be assigned. The two most important criteria for selection of material from the media are level of difficulty and subject matter. Some articles in the press are not well written or contain too much technical jargon for intermediate students. As for subject matter, one should avoid articles that deal with local political problems for which the students do not have the background information needed to understand the pertinent points. For example, among the segments of an evening news broadcast from Montreal there was one dealing with the controversy of raising various types of taxes at the national and provincial levels and another about the first Canadian astronaut who will fly on an American space shuttle. The second topic is not only more interesting, but easier for students to understand from the point of view of vocabulary. The discretion of the teacher is very important in choosing newspaper articles and broadcast segments at the intermediate level so that students do not become discouraged.

Guest Speakers

The purpose of inviting guest speakers to campus as part of our program is twofold: 1) to encourage students to envision a long-range goal and to see how the effort they make on a day-to-day basis in the foreign language leads to a skill level that will be useful and rewarding to them in the future; and 2) to give them the opportunity to learn more about the media in French- and Spanish-speaking countries through direct contact with foreign journalists and broadcasters.

Our first guest speaker was Anne Swardson, a correspondent for the Washington Post. Because of her fluency in French, Ms. Swardson was awarded an internship in Paris while completing her degree in journalism. During her assignment in Paris she wrote several articles which brought her journalistic skills to the attention of Business Week, where she was offered a job after her internship. She later worked as Washington correspondent for the Dallas Morning News and was sent to France on various assignments because of her ability to communicate in French. An excellent role model for students aspiring to careers in journalism and communications, Ms. Swardson described the international reporting assignments for which she was selected because of her fluency in French. She emphasized that language proficiency alone does not qualify a person for a job in journalism; but the candidate who has outstanding skills in journalism plus fluency in a foreign language will have a definite advantage over other candidates for jobs in the field.

In the winter quarter we invited New York-based correspondent

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José-Maria Carrascal, who writes for the Spanish news publication ABC and prepares daily news broadcasts for a radio station in Madrid. Mr. Carrascal discussed his work and the media in Spain with students in the Spanish course for journalism and communications majors. He also gave a presentation in the foreign correspondents class given in the School of Journalism. In the spring José Carreño, correspondent for NOTIMEX in Washington came to campus to discuss print and broadcast media in Mexico.

After studying recent developments in the French media, students had an opportunity to learn more about these events from Henri Pierre, Washington correspondent for Le Monde. While on campus Mr. Pierre participated in a number of French and journalism classes, gave interviews, and chatted informally with students. Louis Lesage, a television producer for Radio Canada and former print journalist, gave students a first-hand account of what is happening in the Francophone media in Quebec.

Having native speakers as guests has given students the opportunity to use the target language in an authentic situation. Journalists with international experience play an important role in our program because they bring a broader perspective to students in the language-media courses and in the School of Journalism. Students continue their foreign language studies with a renewed sense of purpose; they are now able to read the foreign press and interview correspondents in the target language. This feeling of accomplishment is important during the long, often tedious process of becoming proficient in a foreign language.

Evaluation of the Courses

At the end of fall, winter, and spring quarters the students evaluated the French and Spanish media courses by filling out the standard student evaluation form used in all classes taught in the Modern Languages Department. The form contains thirteen objective questions about the course content and instructor. Student responses are scored by a computer. In addition, the students are encouraged to write comments expressing their opinions about the course with the assurance that the evaluations will be anonymous and not made available to the professor until after grades have been turned in.

On the objective part of the evaluation dealing with course content, 90% of the responses indicated excellent or above average in both the French and Spanish media courses. The students' written comments reveal this enthusiastic response more vividly: "This course sparked an interest in French for me--a desire to learn more"; "An excellent class for communications students--I have already fulfilled my language requirement but I'm planning to continue in this course throughout the year"; "My interest in Spanish is renewed." Comments such as these indicate that we are indeed headed in the right direction. Students also made suggestions, such as spending more time working on individual pronunciation. In response to this suggestion, I had my students make their own cassette recordings of news broadcasts and they recorded their questions for each interview, which I listened to and corrected individually. We

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are continuing to perfect pronunciation in this way and by reviewing basic pronunciation patterns in class. We will continue to evaluate the media courses on a quarter-by-quarter basis taking into consideration both the students' opinions and our own assessment of progress towards goals we have set for the sequence.

Conclusion

Our efforts to motivate journalism students to become proficient in French and Spanish have been very successful at the intermediate level. The students who have stayed in the sequence through the third quarter of study are strongly interested in perfecting all four skills in the target language. Five of my students have applied for internships in France and several others plan to go abroad in the near future. It has been a rewarding experience for me to teach journalism students because of their interest in world events and, an added bonus, their good command of English grammar and style. Most of them read the American press daily and enjoy doing the reading assignments in the Francophone press. They are convinced that journalists need to know what is going on outside the United States and how our country is viewed by the news media in other countries.

Creating new foreign language courses for journalism students has brought a higher level of visibility to the Modern Languages Department. Articles about the media courses, the \$85,000 grant, and the installation of the satellite dish have appeared in various university publications and in the

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Ohio Journalist. Our collaboration with the School of Journalism has been mutually beneficial. They are interested in training journalists who will have a global perspective and be able to communicate in another language. In Modern Languages we are interested in freeing the "tongue-tied American." Our partnership with journalism should continue to be a fruitful one.

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NOTES

¹ For information on the journalism internship program in France and Quebec contact Susan Levitz, Executive Director, Club Français d'Amérique, 1051 Divisadero St., San Francisco, CA 94115, (415) 921-5100.

² "Les média dans la salle de classe: L'enseignement du français aux étudiants en journalisme." The Canadian Modern Language Review, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jan. 1981), pp. 320-328. The article is written in French.

³ Published by EMC Corporation, 180 East Sixth St., St. Paul, MN 55101.

⁴ Published by Champs-Elysées, Inc., P.O. Box 158067, Nashville, TN 37215.

⁵ Produced by CBS/FOX VIDEO, 23705 Industrial Park Dr., Farmington Hills, MI 48024.